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C.I.A. MEN OPENED 3 SENATORS' MAIL AND NOTE TO NIXON

Panel Says Aides Inspected
Correspondence of U.S.
Citizens for 20 Years

'BIG' PHOTOGRAPHIC FILE

Committee Agrees to Ask
Ex-President If He Knew
of Intercept Program

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Sept. 24 —

The Senate Select Committee on Intelligence disclosed today that over a 20-year period ending in 1973, the Central Intelligence Agency opened foreign correspondence to and from prominent Americans, including Richard M. Nixon and Senators Hubert H. Humphrey, Edward M. Kennedy and Frank Church.

Senator Church, the Idaho Democrat who is the committee's chairman, described a C.I.A. file of photographic copies of inspected mail as "big" but said that in the case of Mr. Nixon, Mr. Humphrey and himself, only one letter each had been involved.

The letters were apparently intercepted during the C.I.A.'s routine surveillance of mail to and from the Soviet Union, China and Cuba. In that operation, millions of pieces of mail were intercepted, but not necessarily opened and photographed, the Rockefeller commission reported earlier this year.

Criteria Not Known

Criteria used by the C.I.A. in deciding whether to open a particular letter have never been made public. Senator Church said today, however, that the names of none of the 12 individuals and institutions whose mail had been found in the C.I.A.'s files had appeared on the agency's "watch list,"

an index of names that were to be given special attention.

Mr. Church announced that the panel had agreed unanimously at a closed session of the committee that it would ask Mr. Nixon for his testimony on a number of related matters, for example whether he had been made aware while in office of the C.I.A.'s mail-intercept program.

The committee authorized its counsel, F. A. O. Schwartz 3d, to begin "negotiations" with Mr. Nixon's lawyer, Herbert J. Miller, on the time and place of the former President's appearance.

The C.I.A.'s surveillance of mail to and from American citizens, which took place at

various times in New York, San Francisco, New Orleans and Honolulu, has been investigated by other Congressional committees and by President Ford's commission on domestic C.I.A. activities.

But today's announcement by Mr. Church, during the public portion of the committee's hearing, was the first disclosure that the agency had opened, read and maintained in a special file photographic copies of overseas mail sent or received by prominent American political figures.

The file, which Mr. Church termed "big," was later described by a committee aide as having contained "correspondence to and from selected American politicians."

In addition, the Church committee's staff found copies in other C.I.A. files, of intercepted mail that had been sent or received by Dr. Arthur F. Burns, the chairman of the Federal Reserve Board; the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the late civil rights leader, and his wife, Coretta; John D. Rockefeller 4th, the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations and Harvard University.

The incident concerning Mr. Nixon, Senator Church said, involved a single letter mailed to him in June, 1968, when Mr. Nixon was the leading candidate for the Republican Presidential nomination, by an aide traveling in the Soviet Union.

Mr. Church said that the author of the letter, Raymond K. Price Jr., who later served as a speech writer in the Nixon White House, discussed among other things the candidate's

chances of gaining the nomination and a Presidential victory the following November.

In some instances, Mr. Church said, the C.I.A.'s files disclosed only one letter or a few to or from prominent politicians and other public figures, but in others the surveillance appeared to have been more extensive.

He said that his committee had ferreted out new information on the scope of the mail intercept program that would be made public soon, but he agreed to provide a few additional details about today's disclosure.

Other Letters Found

The C.I.A. files also yielded, according to Mr. Church, a letter mailed in 1958 by Mr. Humphrey, a Minnesota Democrat, from the Soviet Union to someone in the United States and a number of letters to Mr. Kennedy, a Massachusetts Democrat, from "peace groups abroad."

In his own case, Mr. Church said, the C.I.A. had seized a letter that he had sent from Moscow in 1971 to his mother-in-law, Mrs. Chase A. Clark of Boise, Idaho.

None of the individuals or institutions named today, Mr. Church said, have been found on the C.I.A.'s index, called the "watch list," of individuals whose correspondence was to be given especially close attention.

That list did include, however, such names as those of Linus Pauling, the chemist and Nobel laureate; John Steinbeck, the author, and Victor Reuther, brother of the late labor leader Walter Reuther.

Today's witness before the Senate committee was James J. Angleton, a 57-year-old retired C.I.A. official who served for 20 years as the chief of its counterintelligence section and was responsible during that time for the mail-intercept operation.

Mr. Angleton conceded under questioning by committee members that the operation, known in C.I.A. nomenclature as HT Lingual, had been undertaken in direct violation of Federal statutes that prohibit any tampering with first-class mail.

C.I.A. operations are typically described by a code phrase made up of a two-letter prefix designating a certain country, geographic region or internal C.I.A. division, followed by a meaningless code word. The agency's project involving the storing of various poisons, which the Church committee disclosed last week, was termed NK Naomi, for example.

As far as is known, the C.I.A. intercepted only letters between the United States and the Soviet Union, China and Cuba, which were made available to it at postal sorting facilities in the four cities where the operation was centered.

The intercept of mail to and from the Soviet Union occurred over the entire 20-year period of the operation at Kennedy International Airport in Queens. The three other operations were of shorter and intermittent duration.

The letters intercepted by the agency to and from Mr. Nixon and the other individuals and institutions mentioned today by Mr. Church apparently occurred in the course of the agency's normal surveillance of such traffic.

Mr. Angleton declined to say in public today just what the "watch list" comprised, or how the names of Dr. Pauling, Mr. Steinbeck and Mr. Reuther came to be on it.

Mr. Angleton, an intense, silver-haired man who was known to his C.I.A. colleagues as "Mother," nevertheless defended, despite his admission of its illegality, the effectiveness of the HT Lingual operation.

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